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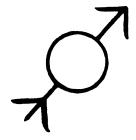
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"THIS WAY, CLARA."-Page 118.

A Bubble

BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF "MR. SMITH," "THE BABY'S GRANDMOTHER," ETC.

WITH PRONTISPIECE BY H. C. EDWARDS

"I, who have love, and no more."

Swinburne.

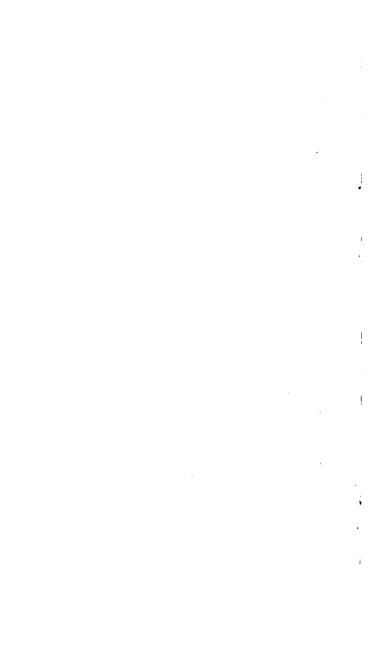
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A Bubble.

CHAPTER I.

ENNUI.

It was a dark, cold, blind, deaf, dumb winter day in the old city of Edinburgh. The leaden sky was heavy-weighted with snow which had not energy to fall. The north wind restrained itself behind its bitter barriers, and let not even a sullen moan escape.

Not an angry day,—but wretched, numb.

Numbness was, in particular, characteristic of one handsome mansion situated in a favoured quarter of the northern capital. General Mauleverer's house in Moray Place had been leased by him for the period of his command in Scotland, on account of its size and situation; but both of these conveniences seemed on the day in question not only to have lost their value, but to have gone over to the ranks of the enemy; since gloom was intensified within its portals by the amount of vacant space; while the circle of monotonous grey frontage without, bore too close a resemblance to a prison's dismal wall.

And Clara had been alone all day! Solitude is not inspiring—not to be coveted, captured, and hugged to one's bosom at nineteen,—solitude, at all events, which is easily obtainable, and of which there is a large stock always on hand. Clara hated it.

To be sure, she had but to lift up a little finger and companions, like a flock of tame doves, would have flown to her feet—but it is a bore to be always lifting up the finger. Add to which, there was perplexity in the very plethora. It not infrequently happened that, rather than be at the trouble of selection, Clara Mauleverer went without,—and then she thought herself an ill-used girl, and petted her sense of loneliness with tender pity.

"Get someone—anyone you like,
—send round for any friend you
choose,—but I must be off; and I
sha'n't be home till late. Good-bye,
my dear." The general would be
putting on his greatcoat, and looking

for his gloves as he spoke; and immediately afterwards the front door would bang, and his brisk soldierly step recede in the distance. Clara's father was a busy man at this period of his life: later on he had time for everything and everybody.

But at present, if questioned about his only child—who was also motherless—he would feel undeniably at a loss.

"What sort of woman is Clara growing into? My dear sir [or madam], I—'pon my word—how should I know? A girl does not tell her father what she is—Ha! ha! ha! Clara is handsome and clever, of course,—but she is little more than a schoolgirl; and if I were to encourage chatter——" Here a decided shake of the head would supply the rest.

Now this insult to her powers of pleasing had been keenly felt from Clara's earliest years. As a child she had learnt that she could amuse others with the selfsame prattle of which her father was impatient. She had cultivated the gift; the more perhaps because of its being thus undervalued; and having now arrived at an age when the desire to be known commonly exceeds the desire to know, she coveted, if the truth were told, foolishly and hungrily the conquests of her tongue. Her other charms were undeniable, but she was fain to test the value of this weapon in reserve.

On the day in question the desire was even stronger than usual; she felt more than ordinarily in the vein. She would not go out of doors; she would stay at home and see people—and be seen of them.

At luncheon time she put on a smart new frock, and looked in the mirror with complacency. The doorbell would be sure to ring ere long; and it would be an agreeable surprise to such hardy folks as had braved the doleful sky for her sake, to find her luxurious drawing-room aglow with warmth and colour, and herself ready to bid all welcome.

Not a soul appeared—not a sound was heard—not even a note was carried up!

"Was ever poor girl condemned to such a forsaken hole?" cried she at last, in spite. "What a blessing that this is the last year of papa's command! No more Edinburgh winters for me, thank goodness! They were

all very well—the little I had of them -while I was a schoolgirl. Coming over from Brussels for the holidays, and flying about from morning to night to cram as much as possible into the time, was well enough. thought I liked it. But how could one tell what it would really be to live here? It is now the middle of January, and we are stuck fast till the end of April! It 's a poor lookout, Clara-what papa would call a 'devilish poor look-out.' Papa has had about enough of it himself, with all his worries and bothers. I know he is longing for his retirement; his peaceful club; and the 'sweet shady side of Pall Mall.' I sympathize with him,-though he does not altogether sympathize with me,-and looks at every nice young man who comes to

the house as if he were a thief! And the poor things know it-and know too that they are never safe. They may be caught at any moment in this wretched, circumscribed nutshell of a place. Papa tells me to 'get anyone I like' for company. That is all very fine; I should like to see his face if he were obeyed in the letter and not in the spirit! And of course I wish to be proper," continued Miss Clara, demurely, "and I would n't be dishonourable for the world,"-with a considerable increase of heartiness, -" but, upon my word, I sometimes think it would have been better if I had given in to having the chaperon. To-day, for instance, I could have had a nice little tea-party "---the door opened-"and now I shall have to eat and drink all by myself!" summed up the malcontent.

As Thomas set out the tea-tray she humped her back, and turned her shoulder upon it; she would not take interest in anything-not while Thomas was in the room. Thomas was only the footman, but it annoyed his mistress that he stepped alertly, and arranged the pieces on his board symmetrically. Moreover, his round good-humoured countenance shone with satisfaction when all was to his mind; and he looked towards her with the obvious thought that she would be cheered by the social demonstration. What business had he to think?

For a full minute after she was again alone the absurd young creature still reclined pouting and disdainful in her pillowy chair, not to be wooed even by the seductive breath of that truly feminine consoler, the teapot; not to be caught by the blandishments of the newly-baked "teabread" light as air, and tempting to the dullest palate.

Finally, however, a listless hand was extended; and the same moment Clara started upright. She had heard no warning bell,—and the house was still enough for her to have heard anything,—nevertheless the folding doors were certainly being once more unclosed, and—yes, indeed; here was a visitor at last! A real, bona-fide visitor—young, pretty, fashionably attired as herself, and rosy from her walk in the open air.

"My dear Mary! Are you a woman—or an angel—or I might suggest—an idiot? To come out on such a day! It is too good of you and too bad of you! With your neuralgia! But here you are; and oh, I am so glad to see you," effusively tossing aside muff and umbrella, and pushing her guest into a snug corner. "Now, Mary, don't say you have come to ask me to sell at a bazaar? Or, to take a ticket for a lecture? Or, to join a guild? For those, my dear Mary, are diversions I can bear up without. I am as doleful as I can be—but your coming has in itself supplied the want, as people say. Now, don't pretend you have to hurry away—"

"Indeed, Clara, I must. The wonder is that I ever found a moment to run round." The young married lady breathed importance. "It is only because I thought I could explain myself——"

[&]quot;Explain away, then; only explain

at full length—as Dr. Macadam explains his sermons; for when the explanation's done, and you are departed, I shall have a whole long evening before me——"

Mrs. Kellum uttered an ejaculation.

"As I have had a whole long morning behind me. In a place like this you can't do anything impromptu; and papa never told me till this morning that he was off for the night. Then it has been such a detestable day that I have had no strength to rout about and invade I have simply sat other sanctuaries. at home and moaned. Mary, Mary, do speak; do say what you came for, and don't try to look sympathetic and pitiful, for it is n't becoming, and you call up the expression too quickly-"

"You dear, merry creature! You must always have your little joke at me!"

From the tone of each speaker it would have been easy for any third person to perceive that whatever General Mauleverer's daughter chose to say or do—in whatever fashion she deigned to take notice of Professor Kellum's wife, all would be gratefully received. "We are such great friends!" the latter was wont to say.

She had vehemently urged the fact half an hour before in conjugal dialogue. It had seemed to the simpleminded Professor Kellum that a young lady of position and fashion would hardly be in place among the students of his class at the University, whom he was about to entertain that

evening at his own house. They were good lads, he said, and he would like them to enjoy themselves; and hoped that the supper which had been ordered would be as handsome and liberal as heart of youth could desire.

His wife, young herself, had giggled at his simplicity. The idea! What heart of youth could be satisfied with such mere corporeal delights?

On which, "Oh, you think we had better have some petticoats!" the worthy man had raised his eyebrows with benevolent intelligence; but neither at the time, nor during the intervening fortnight which had elapsed since the issue of the invitations, and the date on which this little story opens, had it occurred to either husband or wife that Clara

Mauleverer's wonderful French skirts could come under the denomination of "petticoats." It was only on the morning of the eventful day that the daring suggestion spurted from Mrs. Kellum's little active brain "I wonder we never thought of asking Clara!"

She knew very well why she had never thought of it; why she had never once mentioned the subject to her friend. "There is no need for Clara to know we have such things," had been her secret reflection. "Of course it is quite right and proper; and I daresay it will be very good fun. The Mackenzie girls and Alice Gillon declare they enjoy a students' party above all things; and are quite in the habit of going to them. To be sure, these girls are

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different,-every way different from Clara Mauleverer,—Clara is so very ----but after all, she is young and mischievous like the rest of us," meditated she; "I really believe she would come if I told her the whole affair was a good joke; Clara is always ready for a joke. I confess I should like to let those others see her at our house; and in such an informal way. Clara holds herself so very highthough she puts it upon her fatherbut I believe she would come-yes; I really do believe she would come." And on the strength of such musings had ensued the preliminary debate above alluded to.

In the end the professor had been induced to believe it would be a kindness to include a lonely girl, too much hedged in by state, in a jocund party of young folks,—while Mrs. Kellum on her part had promised to refrain from pressing the point on Miss Mauleverer's manifesting the slightest symptom of reluctance, and to accept the most trivial excuse which should be offered by her friend.

"Mind you do, then," concluded the husband, closing the discussion. "I am no judge of such matters; but I would not have any father think we had no right to introduce his daughter to mean society. I don't consider it mean," proceeded the speaker, sturdily, "but I am not General Mauleverer. And I think you should make it plainly understood that it would never do for us to pick and choose; so that it is quite likely that any of the young ladies who honour

us by coming to our party, may have to talk to youths far below them in the social scale. See that Miss Clara takes that in; and then ask her if you like, to come in a friendly spirit, and do what she can towards giving these poor young fellows-many of whom are far away from their own families, and rarely, if ever, have a peep into social life—a pleasant evening. Medical students are not always the wild harum-scarum youngsters they have the name for being; some of those in my class look almost too serious and thoughtful; and I daresay are sore in need of a little sympathetic intercourse with the other sex. If these young ladies will talk to them, and draw them out-set them at their ease, and give them no chance of feeling awkward and

constrained——?" He had escaped beneath a volley of assurances.

"Why, I think it will be splendid!"
Clara had scarcely endured explanations, and scattered apologies to the winds. "It is a most delightful idea," cried she, all animation. "I shall put on my best frock——"

"Oh no, dear; it would be quite too fine."

"Let it be too fine. Where's the harm? I should love to put it on. Something to do on this dull day. Do let me dress up, and turn the poor students' heads," cried she, laughing merrily. "Let me see, you say there are to be fifty or sixty of them, and only twelve of us? How many does that make for each? Shall I have a dozen for myself?"

"Not quite that, half a dozen."

"And I'll poach another half—see if I don't! And the poached ones will be worth double my own legitimate property—"

"You understand, dear Clara, that these young men—a great many of them—are not quite—quite——?"

"Half the people one knows are not 'quite—quite,'" said Clara, frankly—(In her own heart she was saying "You yourself are not 'quite —quite,' my dear Mary.")

"Ah, but I don't mean exactly that." The professor's wife emitted an uneasy little laugh. "Of course society is *dreadfully* mixed now-adays; of course you and I both feel this,"—Clara looked at the speaker, saying nothing,—"but what you ought to understand is—that many of our Edinburgh students have no

claim to be in society at all," proceeded Mrs. Kellum, hurriedly, her ears tingling beneath the something which was hardly contempt, and yet was too closely allied to it to be agreeable in the other's gaze. "One would not wish to give oneself airs," proceeded she, struggling desperately "My husband would never on. allow me, even if I wished to do so; but it was he himself who was determined that you should understand plainly about these students. course some of them are all rightquite our own level-[How nasty she looks! I never can quite make Clara out; but I am not going to give in to her, all the same!]-and you may depend upon me for taking care that none but gentlemen are introduced to you-"

"Bless you! I don't want the—gentlemen."

"How odd you are! But I am a married lady, and you are only a heedless girl. When you see the others, you will understand what I mean. I daresay some of them have not even dress suits, they come from the very oddest ends of the earth; they are the sons of farmers and trades-people; sometimes even of labouring men."

"How interesting! Do let me talk to a labouring man."

"Oh, there is no doing anything with you. To pretend that I had said such a thing! But at any rate you will come?"

"Come? Of course I shall come."

CHAPTER II.

ELYSIUM.

NINE o'clock was the hour for which Miss Mauleverer had been bidden, and punctuality was Clara's strong point. She had been born with a dash of military precision in her nature.

Her brief experience of fashionable life, however, had taught her that the specified hour on an invitation card—unless it were for a dinner-party—bore no sort of reference to the time at which guests were expected to

So far, however, no introductions had been made; and it was not Mrs. Kellum's intention to make them until after she had played her trump card.

One or two were thus beginning to feel a trifle uneasy. Was the evening going to drag? Were their hosts unequal to making it merry and bright as other students' parties had been in the hands of clever entertainers? The bulk of the young men were strangers to all but each other; it was inhuman to let them stand bashfully about interchanging only a sentence or a greeting now and again among themselves. If Mrs. Kellum did not understand the art—but presently one and all understood Mrs. Kellum.

"Dearest Clara, how late you are!"

Then Clara was detained beneath the archway, in a little vacant space, where she could be seen by every pair of eyes throughout the length and breadth of both rooms.

Clara being still so young, was blushing in spite of herself beneath the universal gaze, and its accompaniment of a sudden and unmistakable silence. There had been a loud hum audible on the staircase as she ascended. Even the suppressed murmurs of a room full of people make a creditable amount of sound to a person outside. But now, not a voice was heard.

The professor who, thinking all was going on well, had seized the opportunity to discuss a moot point on which his mind had been engaged during the day, with a favourite pupil whom he had beguiled into a corner for the purpose, broke off short on finding that the young man's eyes had passed beyond him, and that his lips had fallen apart.

Had anything happened? He turned round to look.

For a minute he could see nothing, nothing at least to distract Dirom's attention from his own most interesting topic. He saw Miss Mauleverer come in, and that was all.

Had Miss Mauleverer seemed at a loss—had no one else observed her entrance—he would have hurried forward; but as his wife was there, and the young lady was being held by the hand beneath the archway,—he concluded his assistance unnecessary, and placidly turned round to resume the conversation.

"Yes, sir. . . . No, sir. . . ." said Dirom at random.

"It's too bad to bore you like this." The good-natured savant was fain at length to perceive the perfunctory nature of his companion's attention. "You have done your day's work, and now you want to play. Come; let me introduce you to some of these nice young ladies. There will be some music presently. That's right, I see Mrs. Kellum opening the piano; and now-hum -ah-yes-Miss Mauleverer, Mr. Dirom. Miss Mauleverer. I have been treating this young gentleman very badly; I have been propounding to him a stiff problem which I cannot make head or tail of myself; and now I must beg you to use your fair endeavours to make him forget

it as fast as possible"—saying which, and chuckling to himself, he retreated to another quarter.

"My goodness! Robert, what have you done?" Mrs. Kellum had finished her song, and was a little out of humour at finding it more difficult to sing in crowded rooms than she had expected. She had meant to make rather a sensation, but her high notes were flat, and the lower ones inaudible. She had whispered to her accompaniest to cut out the last verse.

And then she turned round to behold Clara Mauleverer, her cherished Clara, who was meant to be so carefully guarded from contact with the common herd, in the full flow of dialogue with a beetle-browed youth, who was a perfect stranger even to herself! Whilst dressing she had jotted down the names of half-a-dozen men, and two or three girls who were worthy the honour of introduction, but had arranged with herself that there should be a clear space of ten minutes or so—whilst she was singing, in fact—during which her august friend should speak to no one, and be inspected and admired by all.

"My goodness! Robert, what have you done?"

Robert, unprepared for the sharp demand, and easy in his conscience in that he was now talking to a lady on presumably drawing-room topics instead of discussing further medical problems, stared in his turn, equally confounded.

"What have I done, eh?" And the first thing that naturally suggested itself being that he had trampled, or was still trampling upon some terrible feminine appendage, he hastily shifted his position, and looked for the person to whom apologies were due. Failing in this quest he looked again at his wife.

"How could you be so ridiculous?" muttered she, directing his glance; but it was no time for explanations, and relieved in his mind, the worthy professor, after a moment's deliberation, was not sure that he even desired to offer any. It flashed through his mind that his dear Mary, clever though she was, did not know everything. Dirom was the first man in his class,—undeniably, undisputably his most promising pupil—and, as such, able to hold his own with anyone. Women, of course, had a code of their own; and if Dirom had looked awkward and ill at ease—or if Miss Clara were dropping her eyelids, and holding her chin in the air—he might have felt he had blundered.

But as it was—not he! Not a bit of him!

After a moment's survey of the pair who, the cynosure of attention, were occupied solely with each other,—she, all animation; he, all respectful absorption—I fear that the following ungallant comparison took the place of all contrition in the good professor's mind. "She has more sense," he ejaculated internally, the "she" referring not to his wife, but to her young friend.

"Clara, dear, you must be tired of standing? Let me find you a seat—(and someone else to talk to.)" The

latter portion of the sentence, delivered aside, conveyed the speaker's real meaning; and as she spoke, Mrs. Kellum slipped her hand within the round, white arm whose jewelled bracelets flashed hither and thither, as Clara waved her fan.

Somehow Clara rebelled at the touch, fully comprehending it. She was not going to be dragged away from this nice young man whom she had blinded at her first throw, and over whose face such a shadow had fallen at the words. What had she come for? Not to be at Mary Kellum's beck and call—not to be trotted about by her; treated like a puppet in the hands of a showman.

Whilst dressing she had promised herself something unusual and inspiring in the evening's entertainment; and had meant to ask her dear, delightful, old professor to present some of his own particular young men to her. She did not want Mary's men; she knew what they would be,—undistinguishable in every way; she could get that kind for herself better of its kind, too.

But some uncouth Genius—untrammelled, brusque, unused to women and hidden beauties of his soul beneath the warmth of her encouragement and the sweetness of her smile!

In the student by her side she had found, by good hap, the very object she desired.

He was perhaps hardly wild-looking enough,—indeed he had rather a finely cut set of features and a pale, chiselled brow. But in a moment she decided that a savage under-lip

and massive jaw were not absolutely necessary to Genius—and certainly his black hair was long enough—and good heavens! how badly cut!

The introduction having been made at the moment of the piano's being opened, there had been some reasonable time for Dirom to show that whether a genius or not, he was at least capable of appreciating his good fortune in being honoured with the notice of her fair self. He had behaved and was behaving to admiration. He was not seeking more than she chose to bestow; while at the same time, careful not to let a single drop of her condescension be thrown away. His replies were modest and brief; but she could read in his eyes the readiness for more; and it only needed the blank shade above noted,

and the anxious, hesitating movement of one combating the desire to stand the ground with the fear that he ought to draw aside, to fire the resolution of a mettlesome girl who had never felt the curb.

"You let me alone, Mary." Mrs. Kellum's hand was shaken off with decision. "I am all right; go and attend to other people." This for her friend's ear.

Aloud it was "Not at all tired, thank you, I am so much interested in what Mr. Dirom is saying. Mr. Dirom," turning to him, "I should like particularly to hear what you think," and Dirom, with a flash upon his countenance, was back in an instant.

He had half turned to withdraw. But now, why should he withdraw? And for whom? He felt like a knight to whom had been thrown his lady's glove, and straightened his fibres, and prepared to show his valour.

He did not know that womenyoung, gay, fashionable womencould talk like this. He had not supposed, at any rate, that he should ever come into contact with such as could. The small store of learning with which a bountiful education had furnished a rich man's daughter seemed amazing to his humbler notions. His mother and sisters never read-not what he called reading. They would now and then fool away their time over a penny journal, or a worn-out, thumbed-grimy annual. But to keep abreast of the books of the day! And Miss Mauleverer appeared not only to do this, but

actually told him of some whose names he had never heard. He found himself in the odd position of having to apologise; he, one of the leading scholars of the University!

Of course he could explain that he was working night and day preparing for his degree. He could hint diffidently at high hopes of success, and re-instate himself in his own opinion by arguing that only by steadfast concentration of mind, and resolute abstention from all distractions, especially those offered by lighter literature, was there any chance of ambition's goal being reached.

But, when so much had been carefully expounded, it still remained that he had met with a woman of letters who met him on his own ground, and to his delight accepted

his vindication, and smiled superior. It would not be good for her Genius to have it all his own way, Clara was saying to herself.

When she thought him sufficiently reduced, she began to flatter softly. Was not dear Professor Kellum a great man? Was not his class considered the most important at the University? Who was first in it? Who would be likely to take the prize? The professor, she understood, gave splendid prizes; and one day he had told her he had a distinguished pupil—Oh dear, what had she said?

Dirom's cheek had flushed, and he had moved uneasily.

"I am so sorry to have been so gauche," said Clara, sweetly. "Pray, forgive me, Mr. Dirom. I am afraid

I did guess; I could n't help it, you know, I guessed the first moment; we women do, by instinct, when there is anything we have no business to guess. It is our trade. Only, I should not have put you to the blush," she added archly; "it was too bad of me."

For answer he simply raised his eyes, and looked her for a full half-minute in the face.

rank present, it argued with him that Dirom would be at home anywhere.

He did not know that there is a sovereignty before which every lesser emotion gives way.

For the moment Dirom was as a man enchanted; capable of anything; indifferent to surroundings; wrapped in a beatific halo, and conscious only of an exquisite sensation of unanalysed delight.

But to the ordinary eye he merely presented the spectacle of a wellmannered youth engaged in everyday conversation.

"Nobody could do it better," chuckled his superior, watching from afar. "Aye, aye, I knew what was in Dirom—I knew it from the first."

It even struck him as rather fine that, beyond subduing their voices, neither Miss Mauleverer nor her companion took the slightest notice of the music, which, from time to time, obliged those nearer the piano to hold their tongues. The two were sufficiently far off to be exempt from this necessity,—but had they chosen they could have recognised it. He was immensely pleased that they did not choose.

With the advent of the second half of the evening's proceedings, however, Mrs. Kellum saw her opportunity. It had been arranged that supper was to intervene at this period; but she swiftly resolved to insert something before supper, which should throw the whole room into a hubbub, and "work" her friend, as she internally phrased it, to some purpose.

Clara was doing no good, sitting still in one place, partially hidden from view, letting herself be monopolised by a single individual. must get the coalition dissolved at any cost before the move down stairs; or there was no saying what might happen, since it was impossible for a young unmarried lady barely out of the schoolroom, however superior in point of birth and position, to be handed in to supper before the elderly and important wife of a college authority, whose presence at the party was almost as great a condescension as Clara's own. She fancied Mrs. Pringle was yawning wearily and hungrily as it was.

If only her tiresome husband had come as he had promised to do! Professor Pringle could have borne off the beautiful Miss Mauleverer with comfortable phlegm, and prevented all necessity for selection from among the younger men.

As it was, there was only George Affleck.

As a judge's son George was at any rate presentable and suitable—she looked round for George. Alacka-day! Even her pis-aller was in league with the rest. He had found company for himself at another end of the room, and was as well satisfied with it and as disinclined to budge as the lady for whom he was designed. All that remained was to bustle about and start her game.

But the stir she made was mistaken in all innocence by a very important personage. It chanced that the good Kellum had taken out his watch, prompted thereto by inward yearnings, at the very moment when the drawing-room door was thrown open either from within or without—and as his honest timepiece said eleven, it seemed to him that what he had to do was simple enough.

In consequence, before his wife could stop him, or even see what he was about—for she was still heroically struggling with the inertia of hungry people—he had gallantly offered his arm to the portly dame at his side, led her forth, and passing Miss Mauleverer en route, desired Dirom over his shoulder to follow his example. The quartette were half-way downstairs before any of the guests save those immediately encircling the doorway, knew what had become of them.

And then it was too late!

With an inward objurgation which promised ill for the morrow's conjugal peace, the professor's hapless spouse had no alternative but present submission: and the result was that the stream which flowed into every nook and cranny of the tempting supper-room, beheld already installed at a table of their own, a cosy little party of four,—and not a few cast thereon the green eye of jealousy as they passed.

The professor, however, was in great force; cheerily hailing one and another; encouraging the first comers to step forward; and directing their uncertain steps till all the available space in his own neighbourhood was closely packed, so as to enable those who followed, to fill up

the rear with equal facility. He had reckoned that about forty—half the party—could be seated at once, and he was not going to be satisfied with less than forty.

The business arranged to his satisfaction, his benevolent anxiety relaxed; and he had no further care: happily for his peace of mind Mrs. Kellum remained upstairs struggling with her game of forfeits, which was to beguile the tedium of the outcasts above, and if possible defer their appetites.

Undaunted, therefore, by the shadow of coming events the fatherly professor made the glasses fly. The simple gathering touched his kindly soul. He wanted his boys, his poor, dear, hard-working boys whose recreations, when they took

them, were not always, he apprehended, of such an unexceptionable character, to enjoy his hospitality to the full. The more they talked, and laughed, and ate, the more did the light of his countenance beam upon them.

As for Dirom? The only fault he found with Dirom was that the young man toyed with the food on his plate, and left untasted the champagne in his wine-glass.

But how wonderfully the dear fellow came out! And how handsome he looked! Surely Miss Mauleverer must see that he had bestowed on her a remarkable partner. And as certainly Dirom must perceive that he was being appreciated.

Clara Mauleverer must be a keenerwitted girl than he had supposed; yet he had always thought Clara quick and sprightly. It was this meeting with a fresh mind of high capacity which had sharpened her steel and given it point. He was more than glad his wife had invited Clara. Seated in the full glare of light, with all her charms displayed, with glowing colour, sparkling eyes, and blazing jewels, her beauty and the richness of her attire would in themselves have been sufficient to make her the undisputed queen of the evening,-but when to these were added the rare accompaniment of speech alike witty and sensible, he was himself conscious of a newlybegotten admiration. He fancied Dirom must be a proud man at the moment. Proud, too, throughout the evening, even to its very close.

It mattered not to whose care the gay belle was consigned from time to time by the devices of her hostess: it signified little to whose partnership she was condemned by the exigences of the different, and to her detestable, guessing and puzzling games into which the festivity presently resolved itself,—these went for nothing; somehow-let others say how—it is a mystery only known to the initiated-but wherever were seen the twinkling gems and nodding rosebuds of Miss Clara Mauleverer, there, in close conjunction, was to be found a certain dark head, and almost fiercely devouring pair of eyes. Yet Dirom was first performer on the mimic stage.

He was so strung up to do bravely everything he undertook on this evening of evenings, that thoughts and words broke from him like sparks of fire. He scarcely knew himself; and the exaltation of his spirit brought with it a clairvoyance which enabled him to see through every trick of the game, to read, as by a revelation, the very hearts of those who laid the snare.

He inspired his companions. Beneath his influence more than one shy voice was raised to emit something fresh, original, worthy of being remembered.

But when such was the case it was notable that the new phosphorescent flash would, so far from putting out the former, kindle it into increased activity! Dirom's keen enjoyment, his triumph, infected all; and a generous sympathy, it may be, thrilled the bosoms of some.

"He certainly is splendid," conceded even Mrs. Kellum, with grudging antagonism.

She felt almost afraid of Dirom at last; as though she had attempted to stroke a lion-cub and push it into its place, and the whelp had reared itself aloft, a full-grown, powerful animal, with eyes and teeth that bade her beware.

She fancied Dirom must know that she had tried to thwart him, and been baffled, and was now cowed. Instinctively she shrank out of his way.

She caught her husband, however, for an aside.

"Mind you take Clara down to her carriage yourself;" she whispered imperatively. The professor was joining in a laugh, and did not catch the words.

"Eh? What did you say?" demanded he, aloud, thinking the remark had only to do with the game,—and beneath a watchful eye near, the speaker durst not repeat it. She felt as if did Dirom hear, he was capable of tossing her mandate to the winds. She could only frame the single word "Carriages."

"Carriages? But who has got carriages? There will be only one carriage—General Mauleverer's,—I can see if it's come, if you like? That is, if Miss Mauleverer wishes to go?"

"Let me see for you, sir?" said Dirom.

Yes; she knew he was listening, and knew he would not let it pass.

"Aye, do," said the professor, placidly. "Horses must n't be kept waiting in cold weather. But don't ask for it as if you wanted it, Dirom," he shouted merrily after the young man who was already on the staircase.

Quick as thought, the speaker's arm was grasped, and he was led outside the circle imperatively.

"Listen, Robert; that foolish boy must not be encouraged to pursue Clara further. He has been quite idiotic enough as it is. I don't know, I am sure, what her father would have thought. General Mauleverer would have been dreadfully annoyed——"

"Annoyed? Dear me! You don't say so? Annoyed? What put such a thing into your head?"

"What might have put it into anyone's head," retorted she, impatiently. "The silly exhibition Clara has made of herself with this protégé of your's. She is so young and inexperienced, and her spirits carry her away,—but I am very angry indeed with him."

"Pooh! Nonsense! Angry with him? You were laughing as heartily as anyone at his jokes just now."

"I don't mind his jokes; and of course he has helped the evening off; and behaved much better since supper than he did before;—but, Robert, you must see—you must see—"

"I can't see now," retorted he, trying to shake her off. "Say anything you have to say afterwards; this is not the time," and he was turning from her.

But if a guest cannot be controlled, a husband can.

"It won't do afterwards," said

Mrs. Kellum, firmly. "Attend for one moment. All I have to say is, I will not have that young Dirom pushing himself forward, and offering Clara his arm when her carriage is announced."

"Oh, if that's all, of course it's my place to see her out," the professor, all host immediately, nodded acquiescence. "I can promise you that"; and both considered that the promise was just given in time, for the door opened and a little eager maid tripped forward to whisper excitedly to her mistress that Miss Mauleverer's carriage was arrived.

Mrs. Kellum told herself afterwards that she must have been "possessed" not to notice that the message was not brought by Dirom. Someone spoke to her, and she turned to answer, and was immediately accosted by others. Then Clara came up, radiant to the last, and "thought she heard someone say her perambulator had come round," and made her farewells prettily, and linked herself on to the grizzled professor's arm with a natural graceful appropriation which was all it should have been.

And Dirom was nowhere to be seen, and Mrs. Kellum, like a perfect dolt, as she indignantly stigmatised herself afterwards, forgot to think about him.

CHAPTER IV.

ÉCLAT.

"Who was that lantern-jawed young fellow I met going out as I came in?" inquired General Mauleverer, entering his drawing-room a few days after this. "He looked hard at me, and I at him,—but I could n't make him out."

"He brought me a book," replied his daughter. She had hoped Dirom was off the field; and the sudden demand was a surprise.

"A tradesman, eh? Just as well I said nothing. In the half-light I

thought he was a gentleman. Then I said to myself 'Piano-tuner'—though why a piano-tuner should stand still as if he expected to be taken notice of—but perhaps it was only my fancy?"

By this time Clara had recovered herself.

"You will have to make another shot, papa. He was neither a pianotuner, nor a shop messenger. I had better help you out, for you will never guess; he was one of the students I met the other night at Professor Kellum's evening party."

"A gentleman after all, then? I am afraid he must have thought me rude; I gave a sort of a grunt, and passed on."

"It is too late to mind now," said Clara, lightly,—"but if he comes again I can explain that the light was bad---"

"Aye, do; I would not be thought uncivil for the world. One of the student fellows, was he? And Kellum had sent him here with a book? Did you have him upstairs?"

"Of course, and gave him some tea; and we had a most interesting talk. He is one of the first men at the University, Professor Kellum says, and is going to do great things."

"Great things, eh? I wish I had come in sooner; I like to meet a man of that stamp once in a way. It is breathing another air. The young puppies you generally have here——"

"And whom you generally scare off the premises——"

- "Ha-ha-ha! Yes, I send them spinning. They don't come to see me;—but this Mr. what is his name?"
 - " Dirom."
- "Dirom? If I am at home when Mr. Dirom comes again, let me know. I'll apologise for rubbing shoulders with him in the doorway, and mistaking him for a tradesman."
- "Do you think that would improve matters?"
- "You don't suppose I should put it into words, you silly monkey? I should make it all right, of course. Merely say I was hurried; had not the pleasure of his acquaintance; and was sorry afterwards to find that I had missed the opportunity of making it."
 - "If you wish for the opportunity,"

said Clara, slowly, "you can invite him to dinner. I think you would be struck with his conversation; it is something quite different from anything I have ever heard before."

"He does not talk about balls and parties?" General Mauleverer looked amused.

"I don't suppose he has ever been at a ball in his life."

"And yet you find him worth cultivating? Well, I am sure I have no objection. It is quite time that you began to see that there are other things in the world than dancing and flirting. Oh, I know, I know," anticipating a disclaimer—"all of you are alike at your age; all equally silly and ignorant; and however much may be spent upon your education—"

"I feel as if my education had never begun," said Clara, thought-fully. "Papa, that was what brought Mr. Dirom here. He mentioned so many great writers whose names I had never even heard—though you know I think myself rather a reader, and fancied I held my own pretty well with him the other night—but he soon got to the end of me, and I felt so mortified and ashamed, and so absolutely, unspeakably ignorant—"

"That's right," quoth the general, nodding approbation. "That's a good foundation, my girl. I am obliged to any man who makes my daughter feel ignorant. So this is the book?" taking up a heavy volume on which her hand was resting. "Schiller's plays? Humph! I'll

have a look at Schiller's plays myself. Schiller was the German Shakespeare, you know," he continued; not unwilling to display so much erudition. "If you should ask young Dirom to dinner—he would not expect me to call first, would he?"

Clara smiled.

"No, no; of course not." Her father understood the smile. "A poor student in lodgings. But I'll show Kellum that, though I am only a plain soldier, I can appreciate Genius as well as he. No doubt Kellum thinks it would be quite thrown away upon me. He never talks big when he comes to this house, and I warrant, in his own mind, holds us both cheap enough. He shall see; and it will be a lesson,

too, to some of them spruce young jackanapes without an idea in their noddles, to find that it is n't everything to go about with a flower in your button-hole. I'll have Mr. What 's-his-name at my dinnertable——"

"We have a dinner-party next Wednesday," suggested Clara, demurely.

"Have you room for him?"

She had room-or made it.

By the next morning an envelope was put into Dirom's hands, whose superscription made him shiver. Was it possible—was it possible?

He had not even been asked where he lived? He had not even for a moment anticipated any communication between his humble attic and the great corner mansion in Moray Place. And yet he knew that the letter must be from Clara. About the poems probably. And now that he thought of it, she must easily have found his address as well as his Christian name upon the fly-leaf. All his small stock of books were thus protected.

That Miss Mauleverer should have written to him was, still, however, an honour, even when no longer a mystery. He paused before he undid the fastenings of the envelope—paused as one about to enter a royal presence chamber.

And when he had read the few lines, politely turned, as suited a formal invitation—had understood their full meaning, and all that they portended—the young man's heart beat almost wildly. He had gone to Pro-

fessor Kellum's evening party with diffidence and dislike, obeying, as it were, the command of a superior, and inwardly hoping that a duty so uncongenial would not be forced upon him soon again. It was not only that he expected to feel shy and ill at ease in so novel a sphere; it was that he had a constitutional aversion to scenes of jollity even among his fellows. His nature was serious, and from earliest youth he had been habituated to being thrown back upon himself. It was an effort to be sociable with his own people; it seemed an impossibility to be so with the world at large.

But whither now had diffidence and reluctance vanished? The student sat down to his homely breakfast, and mechanically handled cup and spoon, his eyes elsewhere. When he had finished his porridge he did not know it, and twice attempted to sup from the empty plate. Then he smiled—nay, laughed at himself—his eyes were still wandering up and down, over and over the enchanted page!

It was Miss Mauleverer's father, then? And "he had so regretted his apparent rudeness," that he desired to be allowed to "make Mr. Dirom's acquaintance otherwise," and hoped to find him "disengaged for the following Wednesday."

To Dirom's horror, in drinking his coffee whilst still fondly devouring the signature "Clara Mauleverer," a tremulous splash fell from the rim of his cup upon the sheet, almost upon the words themselves. Invol-

untarily he used the remedy nature prompted; and then, as though betrayed into an affront, reverently touched with his lips the place a second time. Although no eye was witness, the colour mounted high on his cheek as he did so.

But time pressed, and the note must be answered before hurrying off to attend his first class.

He looked about anxiously for materials. Of pens and ink there was abundance, but in vain he sought amongst the loose sheets of foolscap, some untouched and some be-spattered with hasty jottings, for a single sheet of note-paper. It ended in his having to sally forth with rapid steps to a stationer's up the street, and obtain from thence the requisite materials. Happily he wrote a good

hand, and happily Miss Mauleverer had written in the first person.

Accordingly the reply which Clara received, if not strictly conventional, was becomingly expressed, and fit for her own and her father's inspection. Clara drew a breath of relief when she saw this; she had felt a trifle anxious on the subject.

And now the only consideration was to whom her *Genius* should be allotted.

When talking of Dirom she called him her "Genius" and General Mauleverer had adopted the appellation. He had quite taken Clara's "Genius" under his patronage, and it pleased him hugely to re-place a gilded youth who had declined his invitation with somewhat curt regret, by this respectful and grateful new acquaintance.

"Really, he will be quite an acquisition," nodded he.

But it was clear that Captain Marshall's commonplace little bride could make neither head nor tail of a brilliant scholar as a companion at a dinner-table. "Genius has a rank of its own," quoth the general, profoundly. "It may not be this Dirom's place to sit at your left hand, Clara, but I think that among all these numskulls, not one of whom will be able to talk to him on his own subjects; it will be only fair to give him someone who can, on one side at least. Suppose he takes in Lord Mackenzie's daughter-the one with the spectacles? She ought to be a learned lady-I presume those spectacles mean something-they ought mean something—for I'll be hanged if they are ornamental,—suppose, I say, he takes her in? And sits on your other side? How would that do, eh?"

Clara thought it would do very well. To herself she added "Almost too well."

She knew exactly how Dirom would sit and watch her, breathing, as it were, the very air she breathed; how he would hear every note of her voice, for whomsoever intended; and mark every movement, every rustle of her dress, be it to or from himself she turned.

Yet all of this would be for her own consciousness.

His demeanour at the students' party had been masterly. Even the bold request, for which he had remained below, had been so veiled beneath the respectful solicitations of a young man for the health of a venerated elder, that the gentle professor himself, when he had suffered the transfer of his charge upon the doorstep, could have seen nothing to call for comment or uneasiness. It was a bad night, and he had a bald head. His pupil's intervention must have seemed well-timed and kindly meant. Clara alone had understood something of what the momentary contact of her hand within his arm, meant to Dirom.

She had understood, and been thrilled through and through. She had greedily awaited his coming on the following day,—for it must be owned that an excuse had been found for appearing in Moray Place once before the afternoon on which there

had been the meeting with the master of the house, and that the excuse had emanated from Clara herself.

She had forgotten her fan, had left it in the supper-room, Mr. Dirom knew where, for he had taken it from her—and, oh, she would not wait for it, but as Mr. Dirom had said something about calling, perhaps she might trouble him to bring it along at the same time?

He had suggested the next day? She had replied she would be at home the next day.

Whereupon Dirom had rushed back to the dining-room, secured the fan under his coat, and beneath the very nose of the abstracted professor, drowsily yawning in the hall, transferred it to the inner pocket of his greatcoat, wrapped in his handkerchief to avert any shadow of mischance. The whole safely accomplished, he had accompanied his kind old friend back to the festal scene, feeling as though Heaven had opened.

Clara had been a little ashamed of herself, whilst yet unable to resist the desire for more of the intoxicating incense — the first of its kind she had ever breathed.

She had taken care, however, that Dirom should find her enthroned in state in the dignified publicity of her own front drawing-room, where anyone and everyone might enter, and in which she could not be accused of arranging a tête-à-tête. She would have scorned to plan it so that she should be alone with her new friend. He had merely permission to come

as others came: the house was free to all; and to do her justice, it's young mistress fully expected that having been so entirely left to herself the day before, she would have an influx, and her new acquaintance be only one of numbers.

Fate had been kinder to him—and to her.

He had had a long, solemn, half-hour of unalloyed bliss. The profoundly devotional reticence of his adoration was tenfold more penetrating than if one syllable of it had faltered into words. Every sentence that passed between the two might have been spoken in the presence of a third,—and yet such a presence would have marred all.

Clara, however, was able to reassure after a fashion her own integ-

"What if I did let him come? I only extended what he was too modest to ask. Why should he not call as well as any other man? would have been treating him though he were an inferior, if I did not just mention where I lived, and what was my day at home. To be sure I did affect to forget it afterwards, and let him seize the opportunity for naming another! That was rather bad: but it pleased the poor fellow, and did no one any harm. Even papa could have found no fault with his behaviour to-day, he was so desperately proper and deferential. As for me, I talked as though I were ninety! We enjoyed ourselves and Mrs. Grundy had no reason to look glum at either of us."

Neither could Mrs. Grundy have

said anything against the second call, except, perhaps, that it was made rather sooner than need have been—namely, within the week.

But then Miss Mauleverer was so anxious to have the book from which Dirom had quoted so many beautiful passages; and surely her impatience to be no longer ignorant of the stores within that treasure-house was too laudable not to be gratified as soon as might be?

Before the dinner-party Clara was not only well up in the two or three plays which were Dirom's professed favourites, but was ready with a few quotations on her own account. Those who were near the head of the table were struck by the superiority of Miss Mauleverer's talents, and very naturally attributed their

display to the neighbourhood of the clever-looking young man who sat on her left hand, and whom they gradually came to regard with a species of awe.

Dirom again exerted himself to the utmost; and again the exaltation of his soul, and throbbing of his heart-strings rendered him indifferent to every other consideration than that of winning laurels in the arena over which the mistress of his dreams presided. He even surpassed his former effort.

General Mauleverer was delighted. This was what Dirom had been summoned for. At his own end of the board he took care to enlighten all within reach as to the peculiar-looking, pale-faced young man who was the centre of so much animation and

the object of so many glances at the other.

In the evening he himself engaged Dirom in conversation, and, not unintentionally, held him fast in the middle of the room. After the guests had departed, he rubbed his hands and congratulated his daughter on the most successful dinnerparty ever given in Moray Place.

"Upon my word, we must make a note of that, Clara. Always have a lion when you have a set of stupid grandees to entertain. They like it. It gives them something to talk about. Lady Charles Raeburn made me bring Dirom up to her, though she has about as much brain as a tom-tit,—but your woman of fashion must be clever, or die. I heard her tell Lord Charles to give his card to

Dirom. That means that she will secure him for her next party; and you may depend upon it what Lady Charles Raeburn does Lady Horn-Plummer will do. My lady was listening with all ears; and if she does not get up something on purpose, never believe me for a prophet again! Well, we've had the first of him; that's one thing. We invented him, or perhaps I should say, you did-or if it comes to that, I suppose the Kellums did,-but then the Kellums count for nothing. In our set we have had the luck to produce this rara avis, and I think we may consider that he has made a hit."

To himself the speaker added, "The best part of it all was, that Dirom made Clara shine too! I had no idea the girl had it in her! Usu-

ally she has looked just like other girls -a trifle handsomer, perhaps, but nothing remarkable, nothing out-ofthe-way-on these occasions. They have bored her, I don't doubt. At the dances, with all the young fellows hanging round her, she has lighted up a bit,-but I never saw her look anything like what she did to-night -never. That old rascal Plummy, who has an eye like a hawk for a woman, told me I must look out for a time of it in London; and Lady Charles Raeburn—as sharp as a needle when her own interests are concerned, was hinting at having Clara to chaperon. Those two are very fair criterions of the effect she will produce if properly handled. Beauty alone won't make a woman go in these days; she must have wit, and fire, and sense—and by George! Clara seemed to have all three tonight. I wish," he mused, "I wish I could have that black-a-vised student always at her elbow!"

CHAPTER V.

EFFERVESCENCE.

AFTER this there was no difficulty about Dirom's visits to the general's house. He did not go very often; hard work as well as native delicacy interfered with his presenting himself in Moray Place so frequently as to excite comment, or detract from his welcome; but he obeyed every summons, understood every hint, and lived on the memory of one meeting and the hope of another.

By sheer dint of resolution—the

rigid resolution of an iron will—he could, it is true, banish persistently the actual conscious thought of Clara during class-room hours, or—though this was more difficult—throughout those devoted to private study. But the influence of his passion remained, nerving him to greater efforts, inspiring yet more ambitious hopes, and imparting an almost fierce energy to everything he undertook.

For the sake of this incomparable creature what could he not achieve? What mountains could not be turned into molehills—nay, be levelled in the dust, if so she willed?

At the close of each day's toil, when, spent and weary, yet still afire for more—hungering and thirsting for more—he would throw himself down on the little hard horse-hair

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sofa of his lodgings, what delicious dreams would bye-and-bye steal over the half delirious brain! An image would glide in, and fill the small, bare room with its effulgence. He would hear the low tones of a voice every one of which was as a note of music in his ear. He himself would breathe forth the incense of love—pure, unfettered love,—and it would be hearkened to unchecked, unrepulsed! Ah me! how the sleeper's lips would tremble then!

And the waking day-dream was scarcely less sweet. He was a favoured, honoured guest at the house of an indulgent parent, of whom Clara was the only child. He scarce dared think what this meant, and yet! ——Then the poor miser would spread forth his treasures—every

word and look and smile that he could call his property—appraising the value of each several one. Not infrequently a tear of very joy would roll over his pale cheek as he did so,

He never spoke about it. He would not let escape the most distant allusion to the enchanted ground his footsteps trod on leaving behind the dingy precincts in which his so-called life was passed.

One or two of his classmates had attempted a little raillery on the subject of Miss Mauleverer, seeing what they had seen at the professor's party;—but Dirom, cunningly inspired by the magnitude of his necessity, threw off their jests with art. He seemed neither gratified nor tormented.

Society, he said, was strange to him, as one and all knew. If he had overstepped the bounds of strict decorum, and encroached somewhat upon a chance introduction, they must put it down to his ignorance of good manners. He hoped he had done nothing seriously amiss. He would not willingly provoke censure; least of all in the house of people who had taken him by the hand, and shown the kind hospitality which had been the means of affording him a new experience.

As he spoke, the student would look round with large, enquiring eyes. They thought he was searching for re-assurance, and good-naturedly strove to set his mind at ease. In reality, he was gauging the effect of his excuse.

After a week or so there was no further need for it. As he never mentioned the subject voluntarily, and invariably it met with the same calm self-abnegation when mooted by others, they ceased to find it interesting, and he could perceive it was forgotten. No one ever dreamed of his having met Miss Mauleverer again,—far less—infinitely less—of his being a constant visitor at her father's house. He could safely go and come, hugging his wondrous secret to his breast.

He was even rather more friendly and free-spoken among his fellowstudents than he had hitherto been. So long as he had had nothing to hide, reserve might invite resentment if it chose; intrusive classmates had been driven forth unhesitatingly from his tiny stronghold, if troublesome; and it had passed around that Dirom was a stiff, unsociable prig, abandoned to ferocious drudgery, and consumed by illimitable ambition.

This opinion gradually modified itself under the new regime. The better sort of students found Dirom "not half bad" when once known, and when, as they protested, his bulwarks had been beaten down. He was getting more human, they said; and some opined that, having acquitted himself so gallantly in the presence of ladies once, he would be nothing loath to try his hand again.

Accordingly, he received a few invitations, and out of sheer fright accepted them. He was in terror lest any apparent disinclination on his part should start anew the theory

that he had been mesmerised for the moment into a new personality, but, the mesmeric force withdrawn, had sunk back into the misogynist.

A hint of this had been dropped on his declining the first social gathering to be held at the house of a fellowstudent, and he had resolved not to say "No" again.

He even found that the homely, cheery little parties amused him, affording, as they did, a quaint contrast to those others in the upper world, within whose gates he alone penetrated.

Not for a moment did he despise the smaller dwellings and the simpler fare. Even the plainer costumes of his friends' mothers and sisters called forth no sneering comparison, since Dirom, accustomed to lofty thoughts and large views of life, had a fine sense of proportion, which made such accessories mere trifles in his eyes. But in spite of this, or rather because of it, he drew the line of demarcation with a strong, unflinching hand. Unconsciously he felt as though he had neither part nor lot with the lively, chattering groups; as if they and he had nothing in common; and although his bodily presence was among them, all that lent it vivacity and vitality was elsewhere.

It was another man who made the centre of attraction in General Mauleverer's drawing-room.

Dirom grew to feel more and more at home there. He was encouraged, drawn out, nay, enticed as only a polished man of the world, such as

General Mauleverer, and an eager, quick-witted girl such as his daughter, knew how, to lay bare the stores of book-learning with which he had filled his solitary life. Had they talked to him the ordinary tittletattle of fashionable life, he would have been dumb,-but whether he found them by themselves or in company, it followed that his entrance would be the instantaneous signal for a higher note to be struck, and he would be, as it were, tacitly installed the master of the theme, whilst others were but attentive and responsive pupils.

The general continued to be more than content with his Genius—especially content because Dirom had declined attending the re-unions of the smart hostesses, who, as the as-

tute soldier had foretold, made efforts to secure him.

Dirom had discovered, he could hardly tell how, that both Clara and her father preferred keeping him to themselves. He had received at their hands the great, gilt-emblazoned cards, and a word from either would have sent him straight to every open door; but Clara had observed carelessly: "There is no need to accept, of course"; and General Mauleverer had added: "You can easily say you can't spare the time; too hard worked and all that"; and he had followed their lead on the instant.

"They won't find it so easy to run our lion, eh, Clara?" Dirom's patron was more gracious than ever; and took an early opportunity of calling on Lady Charles Raeburn and

the other dames of quality who had sought to poach on his preserve, and been discomfited.

Such visits tickled his fancy mightily.

Meantime, winter passed away, and the early spring was drawing to its close. By the end of April General Mauleverer's command in Scotland would terminate, and he had secured a house in London for the season.

This announcement might have been the death-knell to a hapless lover left behind, and truth to tell, Clara shrank not a little from making it to her student friend. She had carefully kept the fact out of sight as long as she could, telling herself that there was no need to disturb his present peace by allusions to a future in which he could have no part. But

to her surprise when, with a breathless start of apprehension, she heard her father all unconscious let drop the casual intimation that another fortnight would see the last of him in Edinburgh, she could see that Dirom's face instead of falling, actually lighted up. He murmured a few commonplaces, and the general presently left the room. Then the young man drew near, and the mystery was explained.

"If I had only known this before," he cried fervently, "it would
have saved me many miserable
nights. I could not speak of it, because the friendship with which you
and your father have honoured me
has been so inexpressibly dear, that
it has seemed as if in going on with
my profession as I am bound to do,

I was forced to give up all besides." He paused to steady the tremble in his voice. She was listening attentively.

"It was decided for me last autumn," continued Dirom, as soon as he could command himself, "that if I took a sufficiently good degree at this University, if I passed as—as high as you know I have done——"Again he paused.

"Yes, indeed, splendidly. Professor Kellum tells us you have carried all before you." Clara embraced the opportunity willingly—far too willingly.

"I should go to one of the great London hospitals"; he looked at her, and a faint colour which started to her cheek was interpreted by him as he chose. "I had no idea you were also going to London," he whispered, under his breath.

Then he walked to the window, and stood there, looking out. The circle of greystone swam before his eyes. What if she, too, would prefer not to be looked at?

Was it possible that these hours of bliss, these twilight talks, these comings and goings, all the intercourse and communion of the past three months were to be continued, were scarcely even to be interrupted? Would another noble mansion become to him as familiar and revered as that wherein he stood? Would Clara in another sphere extend to him the same frank greeting, bestow upon him the same liberal leisure?

In that vast seething metropolis of London it would be even more easy and simple for a poor student to be the friend of such people as General Mauleverer and his daughter, unknown to his fellows, than it had been in small and circumscribed Edinburgh, where a risk of its becoming known was always more or less imminent. His heart glowed in anticipation. He wondered if Clara were also glowing.

Beyond the first faint ejaculation, Miss Mauleverer had not uttered a word, and this silence seemed to Dirom's excited imagination fraught with joyful omen. He remembered that he had not told her of the latest honour he had achieved at the University—one which had been wrested from all competitors.

"It was to tell you this that I came to-day," he now explained. "I knew how my success would affect you—at least forgive me for reckoning upon it; you had said so much," he pleaded apologetically, "that I had come, I am afraid, to feel as if your interest—and your father's—was scarcely second to my own. My one drawback was the thought of parting; but now,"—he stopped, and involuntarily held out his hand. A thin, white hand. Clara looked away from it.

"Of course we ought both to be immensely pleased"; she said hurriedly,—she was arranging some papers on the mantelpiece,—"I know my father will take the greatest pleasure in your success, and the greatest credit, too," with a smiling endeavour to be herself. "He will allege that the charms of his society—our soci-

proached me. Perhaps I did not attract them. Old men, judges, and professors talked far above my poor little head, and even papa was secretly not very keen on their society. To tell the truth, he was a little afraid of it. When you came——" she gathered up her thoughts and, as though looking back into the past, addressed herself rather to it than to the silent listener by her side.

"When you came, Mr. Dirom, it was different. You can hardly imagine how different. You were not like anyone either of us had ever known. You must have seen for yourself that you are distinctly apart from all the young men you meet here, and that even the older ones, although they may have some of your knowledge and abilities, have lost all

the fervour, all the intellectual fire of youth.

"I am talking like an old woman myself now, am I not?" The speaker interrupted herself brightly. "But, you see, Mr. Dirom, I am trying to get at the bottom of what has made this friendship so pleasant—so opportune, if I may say so? Both to you and to us. I think we needed each other. You wanted humanising," with an arch glance. "What you required was to be drawn away from your fusty, musty books, and fagging brain-work—and we wanted someone who would talk to us on our own level, and yet who was infinitely above it.

"That's how the land lies," cried she, peremptorally waving aside a disclaimer. "We have done you some good, I hope. You have done us a

very great deal, I know. Perhaps I may be allowed to add one thing more"; she subjoined, hesitating, yet woman-like willing to soothe the vague trouble in his eyes. "So far, I have united my father and myself in all this; I should like, if I dared, to speak one word about myself alone."

An electrical movement responded. She durst not meet it, nor confess its interpretation by one stammering syllable.

"I little thought when I went to Professor Kellum's students' party on the evening of that dull, tiresome day, that I was about to provide myself with an antidote for every mopish hour in future. I don't know how I have dared so to encroach, or to allow a man already overworked to take upon himself, not only the task of dispelling an idle girl's *ennui*, but teaching her the secret of keeping it at bay during the rest of her life. You have taught me to read—to think—to reflect,—it has been a service for which I can never cease to thank you."

"But why 'Has been'?" mused he,—and thought and thought about the phrase.

CHAPTER VI.

EGRESS.

Who that has ever beheld the witching spectacle of Rotten Row at its favoured hour on a bright June morning, when the London season is at its height, but must own that to unaccustomed eyes it is one to inspire a thousand thrills of wonder and delight?

The Pride of Life is there.

Rank, splendour, beauty, fashion put forth their liveliest appeals to the senses, combine to dazzle the understanding, and enthral the heart; while the varying hues—the brilliancy—of the far-reaching, rainbowtinted crowd, the flash and glitter of countless equipages, the very gloss upon the horses' coats in the sunshine, shed impartially over all, unite, it must be confessed, to form a kaleid-oscope, the like of which is perhaps to be found nowhere else in any quarter of the known world.

Nor, would it appear, does the scene easily lose its fascination even for the initiated; nor yet for those bystanders whose only part is to look on in silence. Their ranks are no more thinned than are those of the more fortunate. Flaunting display on the one hand—homage, envy, curiosity, on the other—may be the underlying current which

sway the shifting throngs—but on the surface all is gentle mirth and harmless gaiety, participated in alike by the great and humble, the prosperous and obscure.

Among these last, day by day, came Dirom.

He had not far to come. St. George's Hospital, which he had entered, being but a stone's throw from the great gates of Hyde Park, he seldom failed to spare the brief midday hour for a quest of strange import.

He came to be tortured. When he had had his torture he went back again.

On his first arrival in London, he had chanced to be somewhat early at the corner most frequented, and found a place close to the railings, whence he could not only see far up the Row, but hardly fail to be seen by any equestrians riding past.

He had not had long to wait. Almost before he could have believed it possible, the Mauleverers, father and daughter, with their bridle reins loose about their horses' necks sauntered leisurely down the course, looking round them and greeting their acquaintances as they did so.

Dirom had made an involuntary movement; and his tall, spare form with its bent shoulders protruding from the foremost ranks of on-lookers, had instantly caught their attention. He had seen their heads turned towards each other, almost seen his name upon their lips, and noted with grateful delight that they came at once straight to him. There had

ensued a cordial interchange of greetings, and a few brisk inquiries regarding his own affairs from the general. Clara had not said so much, but she had smiled kindly, and called upon him to admire the sparkling scene, the charming weather, and her pretty horse.

He had been quite satisfied when the two, waving a friendly adieu, rode on, were presently lost to sight, and did not reappear. He went back to his work with a sense as if something great had happened—almost as keen a sense as that which had transformed the grim University walls after the first meeting with Clara at the students' party.

The only slight, very slight drawback to his present happiness, lay in a trifling omission on the part of his friends: they had forgotten to tell him where they lived.

Of course it was only an oversight; one which the following day would see rectified,—after which what was to hinder his going and coming in London as he had done in Edinburgh? Clara's "Has been" was alas! thrown away upon his simplicity.

Next day accordingly saw the eager youth again among the bystanders in the Row; but to his mortification he had not understood the luck which had rewarded his previous punctuality, and now found himself unable to obtain the coveted piece of vantage-ground. To this was due he was sure—nay, positive—the fact that although he could see General Mauleverer and his daughter over the heads

of those in front, they were apparently unable to distinguish him. They kept, it was true, to the centre of the Row, and he looked anxiously hither and thither for a vacancy anywhere in the front line of spectators into which he could insert himself whilst yet they were within hail—but in vain. He had to see them turn presently out of the Row, and ride off towards Knightsbridge,—and knew that all hope was over for that day. Grimly he told himself that he would not be so baulked again.

He had learned enough of the Mauleverers' habits, and of what was likely to be their mode of life, to be aware they would probably be on the scene regularly each day at the same hour. Accordingly he had established himself with like precision on

his self-appointed watch, taking care to be always in the front row, and within a few yards of the spot whereon he had first been sighted.

How had the manœuvre succeeded? "'Pon my word, it is a little awkward," quoth the general one day, his keen eye glancing on ahead. "There is that poor Dirom at his post as usual! He can't expect to be always taken notice of; and I thought we did the civil when we stopped and chatted to him once. I thought he was only there by chance, and that he was far too busy and hard-worked to be idling away his time out of doors in the middle of the day. A regular loafer he looks!" still glancing disapprobation. "If he has the time to spare, he ought to be taking good brisk exercise instead of standing gaping in a place like this. It is not the place for him at all."

Then the speaker turned his horse sharply round. "This way, Clara; There is Lady Winifred Vereker in her victoria. We can go and talk to her; and—ahem!—here comes Havering. Clara, my dear, one word. There is no need—you understand me?—to speak to everybody one has ever seen or known when one is en evidence as one is here. Havering does not know us very well, and Dirom is such a queer-looking fellow——"

"And looks so very queerly at me," murmured Clara under her breath. Lord Havering himself had a look which it was difficult enough to meet—a look of whole-souled admiration and honest ardour. She felt that it would not be good for the two looks to cross.

When Lord Havering joined them she fancied the sunshine brighter, and the cool odours of the freshly-watered earth more fragrant than before. She found the young man pleasant company worthy of all the golden shower Dame Fortune had poured into his lap; and unfolding daily more and more of those qualities which found response in her own best self.

Dirom had awakened her mind— Havering touched her heart. What more need be said?

It was indeed on this account, rather than in obedience to any promptings of worldly wisdom that the beautiful chestnut ridden by Miss Mauleverer was now invariably guided along the middle of the Row—a shade further perhaps from the railings haunted by a certain unmistakable figure than from those opposite, where there was no landmark mentally labelled "Danger."

At first, when avoidance would have seemed too marked, Clara had, it is true, turned her head as she passed Dirom, and accorded him a careless greeting, a bow, and a wave of her little daintily-gloved hand. But presently when she saw that he was always there, and meant to be there—that he wore a stubborn, dogged, tenacious look—and that she could not come within the range of his vision without being pierced to the quick by his burning eyes—she began to find it best either to turn

her horse and retrace the way whence she had come, or else to adhere closely to the far side of the enclosure.

To her father she made an excuse—wincing as she did so.

"Oho? Dirom is not good enough for you now?" cried he, not ill pleased. "We are grown so very grand of late. And it must be owned the poor fellow does cut rather a sorry figure among all the gay folks, but I don't like to treat him shabbily for all that. In spite of appearances Dirom is still a Genius,—and, if one could explain this to one's friends—"

"But that's what one can't do," murmured she, playing upon his weakness. "And he does look so very peculiar." But she was fain to keep to herself that it was not Dirom's looking peculiar, but his looking peculiarly at her, which was the true source of her avoidance.

Accordingly, when the seed thus sown in General Mauleverer's mind took root, and reappeared as his own idea, Clara was almost ready to quarrel with him for it.

"One has to be so very particular with whom one is seen talking in public places," said he. "If I meet Dirom, and have no chance of explaining who or what he is—what a position he took at Edinburgh University, and what was thought of him there—I am placed in a false position. If my friends were to see me hobnobbing with an uncouth, unkempt individual who stands about in ungainly attitudes, and lets fly with

his long arms directly he begins to talk and gets excited—all of which is well enough in *Genius*, mind you,—but if they, the men of my club, and others who know me, were to see it and know nothing more, they would only think I had damned queer acquaintances. It would be different if I were in Parliament, and he could be passed off as a constituent; but as it is, I do wish he would wear a decent coat and hat," concluded the speaker, as though glad to seize upon some tangible affront.

"You think as the Eton boy did, that the hat makes the gentleman?" observed Clara, drily.

"I think nothing of the sort," retorted her father. "Neither do I think the uniform makes the soldier. But if I were to see a man turned

out slovenly on parade he would not be the man I should expect to see promoted. London is a parade ground; one ought to turn out for it as such. As I walk along Pall Mall or Piccadilly everyone I meet —everyone of any sort of standing is trim and smart, spick and span. Then I fall in with Dirom—"

- "When, papa?" quickly.
- "Just now; a few minutes ago. That was what made me speak to you. I could not pass him, so I tried to be cordial; and unfortunately let out that this was our house. He asked—humbly enough—if he might call."
 - " Oh, papa! what did you say?"
- "Had to say 'Certainly' with the best grace I could. You would not have me throw off the poor fellow

altogether?" reproachfully. "It occurred to me afterwards," proceeded the general, after a moment's musing, "that we might have Dirom come and dine some night when we are alone? Or, perhaps, when only Havering is here? Havering is a sensible fellow, and would see Genius in the light we see it. Eh? What do you think?"

"Papa,"— a momentary struggle with herself, and Clara faced the inevitable;—"Papa, I would rather not have told you,—but—the one man in the world who must not meet Mr. Dirom here, is Lord Havering"; distinctly, significantly.

General Mauleverer uttered an ejaculation.

"I have been very cruel," said Clara, in a low voice. "I have been amusing myself, and letting you amuse yourself with a pastime that has had all its smoothness for us. all its rough edges for-another. He is bleeding now from the wounds. But, papa, to attempt to heal them would be madness. Papa, could you not see-did you not know what brought our poor friend so often to Moray Place? He was not the vain creature you took him for. He did not come to be flattered, and drawn out, and put upon a pedestal: anv more than he came to minister to our vanity by making our parties more amusing, and our house more popular. Can't you guess then why we never had to ask him twice? And why, for all the toil and strain he was going through—working day and night as we knew he was doing

—he never once let himself be kept away?" She paused for an answer, awaiting an outburst.

To her amazement none came. Without a word the proud, ambitious man of the world, who had hearkened with stiffened features and dilated orbs up to the last moment, slowly turned and left the room.

What was it that sealed his lips? Was it a vision seen through the vista of many years, of a fervent, impassioned boy breathing the delirious atmosphere of a first-love; reckless of consequences; heedless of obstacles; owning no allegiance but to the one absorbing passion of his soul? Was it this almost forgotten memory, conjured up by his daughter's words, which made him sit motionless and still with head sunk upon his breast,

described, and Miss Mauleverer was invariably to be "not at home" when he presented himself. It is due to both father and daughter to add that each experienced a sense of shame in giving the order, aware in their inmost hearts that they had themselves begotten the need for it.

When four days had passed, however, and nothing had been seen or heard of the unwelcome visitor, they began to hope that there might be no need for putting into execution his decree of banishment. He had even been absent from his usual place in the Row. Clara drew breath, and a weight was lifted from her spirits.

She did not know that the student was only tremulous to guard the little frail new-born bud of hope which had started into life beneath her father's well-feigned cordiality, and would not expose it to the chance of being blighted ere he should give it at least one fair opportunity of taking root. His work at the hospital did not permit of his making afternoon calls during the week, but on Sundays between four and six o'clock he was free, and he knew that this was a favourite time for ladies to receive. At a little after four he rang the door-bell of General Mauleverer's house.

General Mauleverer's butler knew him in an instant.

"Not at home, sir," he said promptly.

From a flowering path behind the opposite railings Dirom had with his own eyes beheld Clara, but a few moments before, step through an

open window on to the balcony outside; and as he now stood within the portico, he knew that she was seated within a few feet of him, in a lounging chair surrounded by fragrant, blossoming exotics, and shaded from the sun by a cool striped awning which covered the whole retreat.

He also knew that she was alone. It had seemed to him that Fortune was once more about to be kind.

The rebuff was the more cruel as it was apparently accidental. Could he venture to set his informant right? Was it lawful to expostulate even with an absolute fact to put forward? Oh, if it had only been the good old Anderson who knew him so well in the Edinburgh days! Who with his own hands, and with almost fatherly care had often helped him on with

his greatcoat, and folded his muffler when the winds—the piercing east winds of March—blew sharp, and made old Anderson himself cough and shiver!

But there was no glance of sympathy, no suspicion of lurking kindliness in the cold eye, and stolid, impassive countenance now before Dirom. He hastily left his card, and withdrew.

With much satisfaction Mr. Balderon placed it on the hall table. He was glad that he had chanced to open the door himself;—only a very little later, and the footman might have made a bungle of it,—but now his perspicuity could not fail to be noted.

Nothing was said, however, and on the following Sunday at the same hour, not at all to his surprise, for -

he had expected something of the sort, the same strange-looking personage with the scornful air and stern voice, (Dirom could not assume carelessness,) repeated the enquiry of the week before.

Again the applicant had seen the light figure in the balcony,—nay, had obtained an even clearer view of it than on the prior occasion, for Clara had first remained poised upon the low window sill, looking hither and thither, as though debating with herself whether to advance or retreat, and finally had strolled to the edge of the balcony, and remained standing there, like Flora among her flowers. She was all in white, and Dirom saw her pluck a rose, and place it in the bosom of her frock.

Quick as thought he stepped across

the road. He was well within her range of vision; she must have seen him as he crossed.

" Miss Mauleverer is not at home, sir."

A blind, unreasoning impulse found utterance in what afterwards seemed to the hapless Dirom himself, a remonstrance as humiliating as it was fruitless. He could not quite remember what he had said, but the ready "Miss Mauleverer's orders are that she is not at home," with which the foolish, impotent appeal was met, rang in his ears for many days and nights thereafter.

He almost ran down the steps, and sped for shelter towards the leafy gardens. He had the instinct of a wounded animal to hide himself. He hardly knew what had happened, only dimly felt that the sword which had been hanging by a thread had fallen at last.

And then another desperate thought arose. He would not know only the worst, but the very worst. There was one lower depth his misery could take, and into it he would plunge headlong. He would know whether those cruel portals which had been so ruthless to him, would be kinder to another?

He would spy—yes, he would spy upon the woman he loved.

With teeth and hands clenched, he stole back to the cover of the sweetbriar bush which had already done him service, and found that he was but just in time.

Barely had he drawn a breath or two—Clara was still standing out among her flowers—then he saw her hastily recede a space and then pause, turn back irresolutely, and finally skim through the window, into what he judged was a large cool drawing-room behind.

Something had fluttered the fair dove. She had flown either from it, or—to meet it. Instinctively his eye went to the pavement below, and all was explained.

No one had ever told him who Lord Havering was; the name and rank of the latter were alike unknown, but too well Dirom had grown to recognise the young guardsman's face and form, to note every particular of both; and to be convinced that the horseman privileged to retain against all comers his position by Miss Mauleverer's side had also a

place in her regard,—though what this might amount to he could not from his pitiful standpoint justly estimate.

Here now was Fortunatus with easy step, and negligent air of wellbeing, ascending the same portico which he himself with so many tremors had mounted but a few minutes before.

How would it fare with the new applicant? Was he too trembling with impatience, awaiting with choking pulsations the turning back of the great door upon its hinges?

Havering took out his handkerchief, and fanned himself; then lifted his hat as though to cool his brow after the exertion of walking on a broiling midsummer day. Then he turned round slowly and yawned. The heat was great, but the yawn enraged Dirom: he could not understand it.

Rather to his surprise also the summons remained unanswered longer than usual; the truth being an uneasy fear lest it might be the barelygot-rid-of Dirom back again had caused General Mauleverer's astute major-domo to hesitate, and take counsel with himself, until re-assured by a trusty scout despatched to a point of vantage, who pronounced positively that the gentleman upon the doorstep was not their master's bitte-noire.

But just as Lord Havering was about to ring again, and as Dirom was on the tenter-hooks, haply to see him confronted by the same impregnable barrier which had barred his own path, the door was suddenly flung back; there was but the parley of an instant; the visitor passed inside; it closed again—and all was over.

Never once did Dirom walk down that sweet-briar path again. If he had not been resident in the Mauleverers' immediate neighbourhood he might have lived in London long enough without seeing Clara, not knowing what she did or where she went. As it was, it seemed as though he could not avoid meetings, and had glimpses of her at every turn.

He did not think she ever saw him. She was usually surrounded by others, and engrossed to all appearance by their society and conversation. He little knew how surely he was seen, and with what eyes he was viewed! Perhaps it would have been some-

thing to have suspected that after some such encounter the woman he worshipped would go home saying to herself that this joyous summer-time over which hung a glamour ineffable, ineffaceable, had yet its dark and bitter cloud—that the rigid, stricken face from which she was never safe, and which haunted her in fancy still oftener than in reality, was in itself a punishment not inadequate to the offence.

One night—a sultry, stagnant night in July, Dirom, unable to sleep, was returning from a stroll along the Embankment by way of one of the great squares, when his path was obstructed by a crowd on the pavement, the meaning of which was explained by a crash of festivity within and without a brilliantly lit-up mansion. A long line of carriages led up to the door, and as each discharged its occupants in front of a covered way, red-carpeted beneath, our foot-passengers, with a sense of irritation, wondered by what right the passage of free citizens was thus obstructed? A little thing made Dirom weakly pettish now.

What did he care for the lords and ladies going to the Embassy ball? He pushed forward rather rudely to force a passage, and found himself face to face with Clara Mauleverer!

The hot breath almost hissed through his lips as he started back. Perhaps she also started; at any rate she dropped her fan; and swift as thought, he had stooped to pick it up for her—(she herself had taught

him such small acts of gallantry)—when a policeman's touch held him back, and a good-humoured but peremptory "Can't allow that, you know" replied to his angry frown of amazement.

"Oh, I'm not saying who yer may be, or what yer may have meant to do; but horders is horders, and mine is to see that nobody touches nothink," subjoined the guardian of property; and satisfied with himself, he viewed the contempt of the possible thief with philosophy. Another man would have enjoyed and repeated the jest—to Dirom it presented itself in the light of a new and horrible degradation. And Clara had seen it! Seen him standing there among the riff-raff, presumably pleased with the show, and excited by vulgar curi-

osity and servility! He ground his teeth.

Clara had hurried on; but before she could reach the topmost of the stone steps, a resplendent figure, blazing in the full-dress uniform of the Guards, appeared in the doorway, and ran eagerly forward, as though her coming had been expected. A momentary halt of the whole party enabled Dirom to verify the features of the new-comer.

His own flushed and paled as he did so.

In his ear a kindly Irishwoman raised a shrill note of benediction. "Arrah, thin, blessins on thim for a bonny pair!" Dirom looked as though he could have struck her.

He saw Lord Havering with an air of proud devotion and appropri-

ation, escort the stately general and his lovely daughter forward till they were within the glittering throngs which swam in a blaze of light before his eyes; and then he found that he was himself being gently escorted, and that in an opposite direction.

"You don't seem quite yourself, young man." This time the burly policeman regarded the offender somewhat more leniently. "Our dooty on these nights is to keep the way clear, and I'm obliged to reanyone what obstructs it. move You was right out upon the cloth, a-starin' straight in through the doors, -and a lady from behind a-tryin' to pass you all the time! But I somehow don't fancy you knew what you was doin': now, did you?" he suggested persuasively.

Dirom put a shilling in his hand.
"Golly! What's this for?" exclaimed he, confounded. Dirom did
not know. He crawled home without knowing anything more.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXILE.

DIROM was in the habit of frequenting on Sunday mornings a poor little place of worship whose very plainness and baldness was in keeping with his own sense of utter destitution. It seemed as though in it his soul could empty itself unchecked into the bosom of his Maker. When not hindered by hospital duties, he was a regular attendant there.

But one oppressive morning, when he knew that the little chapel would be like an oven, and when his head ached in sympathy with the elements, he turned into a nearer and more imposing edifice, unaware that it was the church attended by the Mauleverers.

He had ceased to be guided in his actions by the Mauleverers. Clara's engagement to Lord Havering had been publicly announced, and he had searched for and found the paragraph. He had gone about his work as usual.

On this particular morning, however, his dulled senses were to start anew into activity; she was there; she was only a few paces in front of him as the congregation dispersed.

He could see her smile, turn her head, glance backwards as though some of her party were behind, and dreading to meet the glance, was hanging back, but the pressure of the crowd made locomotion slow for one and all, and at one point where all came almost to a standstill, the fragment of a conversation was unavoidably overheard. The first words spoken prevented it falling upon deaf ears.

"Clara goes, of course. But she says it is for the last time. No more polo for me after we are married!"

"So you have only one more chance of being smashed up? All right; I must try if I can manage to be in at the death. Let me see; Hurlingham, Saturday, four o'clock; is that correct?" The speaker passed on, but "Hurlingham, Saturday, four o'clock" burned itself into Dirom's brain, and summoned him like the call of Fate.

He made enquiries, and found that

there was to be a polo match at that time and place, and that Lord Havering's name was among the players. With savage scorn of his own extravagance he paid the entrance fee, and was on the ground before the match began.

The day was frightfully, scorchingly hot, and, surfeited by pleasure the gay world had apparently little energy left for a spectacle which had no particular interest for any beyond the friends and relations of those taking part in it. Coaches and carriages indeed arrived in quick succession; but their occupants proceeded at once to the shady lawn of the club-house, or to the adjacent groves, where milder amusements were in vogue. The open space fronting the polo ground was so sparsely popu-

lated as to permit even Dirom's unaccustomed eyes to detect at once the party of whom he was in search, as well as to have his choice of chairs in their vicinity or at a distance. He stalked to the most distant corner, wondering why he had come, and half disposed to go back before the play commenced.

Then he found himself too conspicuous in his isolation, and hastily shifted his chair to the neighbourhood of a thin line of spectators. Here he did better, and was gradually dropping into the torpor which had crept upon him of late, when he became aware that among the brisk chatter going on around, a voice was familiar to him. Cautiously peering round, he made haste to withdraw. Could he face the lively exclamations

and curiosity of Professor Kellum's irrepressible young wife at such a moment?

Mrs. Kellum was apparently enjoying herself, and considering she was quite in the *beau monde*.

Probably she had not as yet perceived the Mauleverers, but she was sure to do so, sooner or later, and should she, by evil fortune, find himself also?—Dirom shuddered at the possibility.

Even in former days, he had winced beneath the tittering significance, not always good-humoured, of a would-be patroness. By some means best known to herself, she had ferreted out material sufficient for the fancied artillery of her wit, and it had been mercilessly let loose whenever chance afforded.

"Oh, don't tell me, Mr. Dirom. I know all about it! I know why you have never time to spare for poor little us now! Oh, those allengrossing Mauleverers!"

Yet more bitterly did he call to mind a parting home-thrust: "You must n't expect to see so much of the Mauleverers in London, you know. Excuse my giving you the hint; I know the world a little better than you do. The general boasts he has invented you; and I know they have quite taken you up this winter,—but——" and a provoking shake of the head had revealed the speaker's prognostications. Could he endure to have her see now with her own eyes how amply these had been fulfilled?

He drew off with the intention of quitting the ground, but a sensation of dizziness made him sink into a chair before he had gone many yards. Fortunately, this took place however, close to the open ground in front, so that he could yet hope to avoid discovery by keeping his back resolutely turned on all in the rear.

After a few moments he was better, and even tried to feel something of the interest he was forced to feign in the game which had now commenced.

It looked amusing and exciting; he was genuinely astonished at it, at the horsemanship, and at the enthusiasm shared alike by the riders and the high-couraged little animals they bestrode; now and then a rush took place within a few feet of the spectators, and it almost appeared as if the barrier were to be swept away! Dirom was just thinking "Some of

them will be over directly," and viewing with stolid, stupid gaze a charge which was making straight for himself when—something happened.

He was told all about it afterwards.

Questioned on the point, he said he felt no shock, was not aware of any furious blow, but could recall a sudden shoot of pain in his head, then a surging in his veins, and nothing more until he was awakened by a low murmur of voices, and found himself in a cool, dark place with water being gently splashed upon his forehead.

He was, although he did not know it, in the Hurlingham club-house, to which he had been carried with anxious haste, and where Lord Havering, whose own excitable little animal had been the delinquent, was now holding a consultation, and taking to himself what the surgeon who had examined Dirom's wound, considered to be a very unnecessary share of blame.

"Of course you can do as you like," observed the latter, curtly; "But allow me to say, that the damage done by your pony is hardly worth thinking about. He went down from sunstroke-the commonest thing in the world in heat like this. You say your pony kicked him? Well, he has got a slight bruise on the leg, which may swell up, and turn black presently; but to have him removed in your lordship's carriage, and taken to your own rooms to be nursed is—excuse my plain speaking—a piece of fudge.

him back, if you will, to his house or lodgings——"

"All right. The carriage will be here presently; and I can drive him up in the cool of the evening. You will stay until I return?" and Lord Havering hastened from the room.

Outside the door his face took a dogged look. "No, you don't, Mr. Doctor"; he muttered. "I can play my own hand, thank you."

Then he found the Mauleverers, and told them what he was doing, not suppressing, for he did not know, Dirom's name; so that even Clara was unaware that the man who had been hurt, and to whom Havering was now intent upon offering all reparation in his power, was none other than her unfortunate lover.

He was to be taken to Havering's

rooms at the Albany? How good of Havering—how like him!

Havering saw them off, and returned to his charge.

"You feel better?" he said cheerfully. "You are not afraid of the drive back to Town? Oh, you are not a case for St. George's Hospital," catching a feeble murmur. "Oh, I beg you pardon. You said 'Near St. George's Hospital'? All right; you'll tell me when we get thereabouts. I say, not another word of 'troubling' me; it is I who ought to be grateful to you for not dying at my hands, or rather at my pony's heels "-and thus talking in an easy, friendly fashion, -doing his part well, as Dirom could not but acknowledge, the latter was beguiled into submission, and fancied security.

He had no power of resistance left in him.

And then followed a curious dream, which lasted for days and weeks together.

Sometimes the sick man wondered dimly why he was not in his own little, hot, dusty room, where an open window would have but let in the bawling of innumerable street cries—sometimes he forgot all about it, and accepted as the most natural thing in the world the luxurious repose of a strange apartment, the ministrations of an attentive nurse, and the coming and going of a kindly face which grew to be missed and watched for, and finally resolved itself into that of a dear friend.

"You had fainted away again by the time I got you to the Corner," said Havering, sitting on the bed one day, "so it was easy to cart you in here, poor chap, without your being able to say whether you would or no. had meant to do it all along, I must own. I knew you were bad, whatever that fool of a doctor might say. So I just took my own course, and wired up for the room to be ready, and a nurse sent for. Was n't I jolly glad to see her when we arrived? You like a dead man, and I like the murderer coming to give myself up! Since then you have been the general pet; now, have n't you? My fellows all ask after my 'pet'; and, I say, we shall miss you when you have got to get well and be off. As it is, you are not very fit yet, and as for sloping off, don't think it. You are not ripe for a move, not by a long

chalk." Thus he would prattle on, dangling his plumed helmet as he spoke, if he had been on duty. Wherever he had been, he never failed to have a chat in the sick room before passing on to make his toilet. He kept it sweet with flowers, and cool with shaded blinds and blocks of ice. He kept his invalid amused with illustrated papers.

Dirom did not look much at these, but if they were chiefly for the benefit of the nurse who received them with alacrity, at any rate the kind intent was discernible. To Dirom it was inexplicable.

At length the time arrived when he could sit up daily, and be located in an easy-chair beside the open casement of the sitting-room; and a few days after the change was made, Havering coming home late, and finding him still up, sat down on the arm of the chair, and fell to musing instead of pouring forth his usual stream of easy nothings. made a remark; his companion started; then without replying, bent down, and looked him earnestly in the face. "Yes," he said, as though answering himself and not the other, "I think you'll do now for the present. Dirom, you have been at me on every possible opportunity to find out what is the meaning of all this? You were 'cute enough to discoverill though you were when I abducted you-that it was not altogether-I mean that things were not altogether what they seemed. It was not precisely compassion—nor yet a sense of guilt-neither was it altogether my admiration for your lugubrious style of beauty "—laying a playful arm across the other's shoulders— "which made me bring you to this old den of mine."

Dirom cast upon him a look of love.

"I knew you were on the ground before my pony kicked you," proceeded the speaker, "and that it was your falling in front of his nose which made him swerve." He paused as though to ensure attention and intelligence, then turned away his head, and a shade of effort crept into the tones of his voice.

"We know each other so well, now," he said, again pressing affectionately the shoulder beneath his hand, "that I am going to make a clean breast of it with you, and I think—I hope—you will do the same

with me. When we unfastened your collar after the accident-some of us fumbled a bit, and one twitched out a small packet fastened by a ribbon round your neck,-hush!-wait a moment!-nobody looked at the packet, and with my own hands I replaced it as before. But I saw-I could not help seeing-for the writing was so large and familiar—a a—superscription——" Α pause. Both breathing quickly. "I am going to be married, Dirom. And I ask you, as one man asks another, why are you wearing next your heart letters from my future wife?"

There was a long, awful silence.

Then "They are not letters," faltered poor Dirom, almost inaudibly.

"They are communications in her handwriting," said Lord Havering. For all answer the other put his hand within his bosom, drew forth the packet, and held it out.

Havering pushed it back impetu-"You cannot suppose I ously. meant that?" Then caught himself up, bit his lip, and trusted the momentary contempt had passed unnoticed. "You cannot suppose that I would doubt for a moment either Clara, or you? Even if I had not," with a faint smile, "seen for myself the proper, formal ending of a young lady's proper, formal note? It was all I did see, Dirom; I give you my word of honour that the only words which met my eye were 'Yours sincerely, Clara Mauleverer.' No, no, I will not look," he added, as Dirom still, with shaking hand, again extended the little, faded, crumpled

packet; "I have no desire to look. To look would tell me nothing. It is from your own lips that I must hear all."

Ere the morning sun arose, he had heard all, and rivals as they were, neither dreamed of calling the other by such a name.

CHAPTER IX.

EXEUNT.

- "I THINK you ought to see him."
- "Oh, Havering, must I?"
- "I think you must. You will be sorry all your life afterwards if you do not."
- "I am sorry now. Sorry beyond what words can express. I mean sorry for the past"; Clara explained. "Would it not do if you were to tell him so?" And she stole a wistful glance.
 - "Dear," said Havering, steeling

his honest heart to be unmoved, "if I were to say so now in order to save you pain-and you know how gladly I would save you if I could—the day would come when you would blame me even more than I should blame myself. Dirom has set his heart upon this meeting. He does not press it; he even affects to think your granting it most unlikely; but I can see that it is seldom absent from his thoughts; and now that he has come to the end of his stay here, and nothing more can or will be expected of you, I think—I do think you will be happier hereafter if you grant one request to which he will be able to look back with pleasure."

"How can it give him pleasure? He must hate me. He ought to hate me";—her bosom heaved. "He does not hate you at all. He sees now that it was all a mistake from beginning to end. And I fancy he only wants to beg your forgiveness for having misinterpreted your and your father's generous encouragement."

"'Generous encouragement'? I fear generosity had little to do with it! Only, Havering, the other idea was impossible, so preposterous—"

"Of course. But recollect what you yourself told me went on for some months this winter and spring—and that just when the poor fellow was intoxicated with college success, which of all kinds of success is the worst for turning a poor fellow's head; as I know—though not from personal experience," he added with a smile. "Some of our Oxford men

were simply insufferable after it, Dirom never would be insufferable——"

"Oh, no; he was always modesty itself. We could hardly induce him to let himself be 'trotted out' as we should have liked. Oh, Havering, we did behave shamefully; and the only excuse I can make for myself is that though I saw—I could not help seeing something of what was in his heart, (and it seemed to me rather a fine thing to be the subject of a secret sentimental passion—like Tasso's for Leonora, and—andothers)—I never thought, never supposed it was more to Mr. Dirom than this—until we came to London."

"You cannot say more for yourself than he does for you, sweet penitent; indeed had I listened only to Dirom, I should have supposed him to be the most impertinent, presuming, encroaching——"

"He never, never was that."

"It was you yourself who told me how continuously you and your father worked upon his ambition, and assured him that talents such as his should be satisfied with nothing less than the attainment of the very highest distinctions. Did you not tell me that those were General Mauleverer's very words? And that you and he had repeatedly instilled them into Dirom, and rallied him when he spoke of doubts and difficulties?"

"It is true, we did. But," murmured Clara, looking this way and that; "but you see, when we spoke of 'distinctions' we meant only one kind of distinction. Neither my father nor I could possibly have sup-

posed— Havering do you know that Dirom is only a small farmer's son? Think of me as a farmer's daughter!"

"Indeed I can't." Her lover kissed her, and smiled at her. "I confess I can think of nothing so strange and unnatural"; his mental gaze beholding this radiant creature within his own ancestral walls, fit setting for such a jewel.

But in another moment Havering was again the persevering, tenacious suppliant. "Clara, my darling, I do not know how to plead——"he broke off abruptly—"but if you had once heard your poor friend speak for himself—seen him, as I have, flush all over at the mere mention of your name,—then lie back with burning eyes and quivering lips——"

"Havering! . . . Does he look very ill?"

"He has been ill, you know," said Havering, evasively, "and of course he looks it. He is better now than he was a week ago; much better since we have it all out between us, and there is no longer a load upon his mind. We talk quite cheerily together, and he declares he will be all right once he gets back to his own people and his own land, Says he has been leading a false life altogether. Says he has been playing the fool, working like a galley-slave in working hours, and for recreation following a will-o'-the-wisp "-he shot a glance.

"If it would be any sort of consolation?" she struggled with herself.
"To meet you once more on equal terms would be in itself a consolation. He would no longer feel himself despised. Not knowing that you had penetrated his secret, it seemed to him, when the reaction set in, that he was dismissed on other grounds than those of his own presumption. He thinks of it as 'presumption' now, believe me. I have done what I could," continued Lord Havering, "but this fixed idea will never be wholly eradicated from Dirom's mind whilst you refuse to say your own farewell."

"I do not refuse. Bring him," sobbed she, melted at last.

Without a word her lover left the room.

He had brought the invalid to General Mauleverer's door in a closed carriage, and under some slight pretext left him there awaiting his return. Each knew, though neither would openly proclaim what was the object of the visit.

"Are you not getting in?" said Dirom, feigning to expect this move on his friend's reappearance. He almost fell, as without a word being spoken, he realised that the mission had had another ending.

But when the two had mounted to the threshold of the inner room in which Clara sat, Lord Havering made a momentary halt and looked earnestly, almost imploringly, in the other's face.

"Spare her, Dirom, all you can."
Inwardly he added: "What you cannot spare her is the shock of
—yourself." Then he opened the
door, gently pushed his visitor with-

in, and immediately closed it. The door of another room stood open, and thither he retreated, taking out his watch as he went and holding it in his hand. "Not one minute over the quarter of an hour do I give them! It had got to be done,—but they will both bless me when it is over." And his own quarter of an hour seemed as though it would never end. Punctually at its close he presented himself.

He could see that Clara had been weeping, but Dirom's face wore a look of peace and quietude never seen on it before.

"Well, now; I think we must be off," said Havering, cheerfully. "Here is a man who has a long journey before him to-morrow, and it is my business to see that he does

not do too much, nor talk too much to-day."

"Mr. Dirom tells me he is going back to Scotland," Clara bent over some flowers. "I hope he will grow quite well and strong there."

"Oh, yes"; said Dirom, quickly responsive to the gentle tones of courtesy. "I am sure to get well. I am to have a long holiday; and whether I ever return to London or not, I shall have plenty of time to pick up all I have lost, before getting back to harness again. This hot summer —— "he murmured vaguely.

"Yes, indeed; it has been a terribly hot summer; we all need bracing. Papa and I are going to Homburg; but I should think the fine mountain air of your native land

would be better than anything; and then——"

"It is the solitude I long for," burst from Dirom's overcharged bosom. "To be away from this endless, restless, fathomless mass of humankind! To be out of sight of it—out of sound of it! To be alone with the great sky, and the sea, and the eternal hills!" His sunken eyes dilated as already beholding the prospect of his dreams.

"Sounds jolly, does n't it?" said Havering, pleasantly. "We feel about the same, don't we, Clara? We love the good old country, with its fields and hedgerows, and the rooks cawing overhead. No trumpery town life for us!"

"Indeed Mr. Dirom must not think of me always as the mere butterfly he has seen me lately," Clara looked from one to the other, with a softened earnestness which suited well the moment. "Havering and I are going to do all sorts of things, and lead a very busy, useful life. We mean to make our real home down in the country—on his estates,—where he is to be a model landlord; and we shall only come up every now and then to take a little, little peep into the gay world," smiling. "Sometimes we shall go to Scotland—"

"And I know whom we shall hope to see there." Havering took up the cheerful, beguiling note, and slipped his hand within Dirom's arm, "So, now?——"he hinted.

"So, now, it is 'Good-bye' for the present"; but in spite of herself Clara

faltered, and a flood of warm colour suffused her cheek and brow.

"Good-bye," said Dirom, in a firm steady voice. After a momentary hesitation he raised the hand within his to his lips.

"God bless you both," he subjoined, as calmly as he could; and thought he had pronounced the words in an even, audible tone. But the soundless whisper scarce reached the ears of those for whom it was intended: and Clara raising her frightened eyes to follow with them the retreating figures, saw that Lord Havering looked very grave indeed as he led his charge from the room.

It was a brisk October day, with a blue sky and nip of frost in the air,—and a large and fashionable assemblage was gathering together for the purpose of attending a wedding ceremony.

Lord Havering, most popular of guardsmen, was about to be married to Miss Mauleverer, one of the belles of the London season. No one who could possibly dash up to Town for the occasion would be absent.

All went well.

The full paraphernalia of wedding state was strictly carried out. There was the crowd within and without the church, the rolling of wheels, the bustling of officials, the odour of exotics; anon the lisping of bridesmaids, the sweet singing of choristers, and the solemn benedictions of ecclesiastics;—and as the happy pair knelt at the altar amid

the momentary hush of the gaudy curious throng, a slanting ray of sunshine shot from a hidden window, and fell full on Clara's head—giving rise to the old adage on one smiling lip and another, "Happy the bride whom the sun shines on!"...

The same week—nearly on the same day—a humbler cortège wound its way along a rough, weather-beaten track upon the Scottish coast, and halted in front of a lonely graveyard lifted just above the sea line.

A simple coffin carried shoulderhigh led the way. Behind came a long procession of mourners, with slow, and some with tottering steps. As they walked they raised a wail of lamentation.

There was none, they said, who had ever gone forth from his native

place with higher hopes and anticipations: none of whom it had ever been prophesied that he would bring back such honour, and confer such pride, as he for whom the earth had now been opened.

Oh, that the father's triumph and the mother's joy should have ended thus! Oh, that the green ear of the harvest had been cut down and not the ripe! Long would it be ere such an one again arose to go forth and win the world—long might it be ere such another thus fell vanquished in the strife!

And on the walls of the old farmhouse there glittered a row of splendid prizes—and safely folded away within the recesses of a locked drawer was the Bible which the worn hands had clasped in Death—and but little else bore outward witness to one undying memory in Dirom's home.

"God bless my soul!" cried General Mauleverer when he heard the tidings. "What a confoundedly sad thing to happen! Poor Dirom! The poor fellow must have worked himself to death! The old story, you know,—the old story! Genius and—Consumption. Genius was poor Dirom's strong point; and I confess I always thought there was something sickly in those hollows at the back of his neck. Genius and Consumption—aye indeed!" And he wrote the phrase off to his daughter the same morning.

Lady Havering was roving gaily 'neath Italian skies in the first flush of her honeymoon, but the letter sent her straight to her husband's arms, where she wept such scalding drops of grief and penitence as made Havering forget she had ever been in fault, and rack his brains for every sort of tender assurance and view of the subject which the ingenuity of love could devise. He knew that she was dearer to him for every tear she shed.

And Andrew Dirom lay in his wild moorland grave over which the seagulls screamed, and the drift flew, when the winter winds were high.

They said it was over-pressure of brain work, joined to native delicacy of constitution, which had destroyed the splendid promise of his youth,—but it was not—it was the bubble which had burst.

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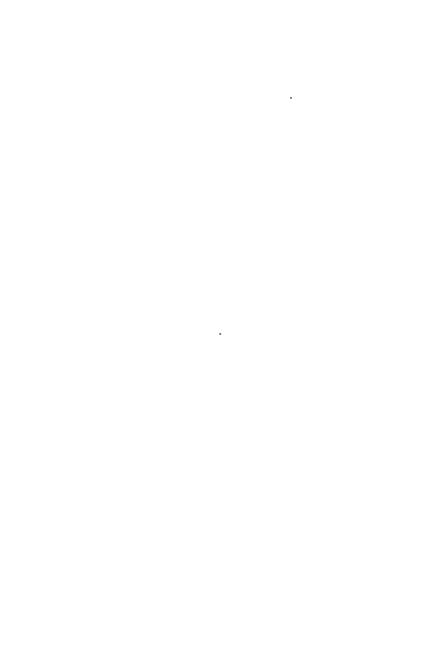
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